

FOR THE CONGRESSIONAL RECORD

October 16, 2007

**Statement of Representative Pete Stark
In Support of Freedom of the Press**

House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation
Honorable Elijah Cummings, Chairman

Statement of Congressman Pete Stark

Field Hearing on the San Francisco Bay Oil Spill

November 19, 2007

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member LaTourette for coming to the Bay Area and holding this vitally important hearing. Many of us who call the Bay Area home heard the news of the oil spill and our response was shock and sadness. As information about the response and cleanup has emerged over the last two weeks this sadness has turned to disbelief and anger.

Over the last several years, we have seen a tragic pattern of failed disaster preparedness and response by the Executive Branch. I know this committee will ask the necessary questions to determine why cleanup efforts in this case were so delayed and information so hard to come by. I urge you all to foster the policy changes that are required to make sure the Coast Guard's dismal performance is not repeated. As a body, I hope the entire Congress can provide the accountability and answers to why the federal government—from Katrina to the current spill—has failed to safeguard our people and our natural resources.

The aftermath of the spill has been devastating. Nearly a thousand birds have been killed, with many more likely to perish. Twenty-seven beaches have closed and nearly the entire Bay Area fishing and crabbing fleet is shut down. The economic and environmental consequences of this disaster will be felt for many years to come. In light of these sobering realities I urge the committee to examine the following issues:

- Are tougher vessel standards and safeguards, such as double hulls or improved monitoring of ship navigation, needed?
- Does the Coast Guard have sufficient authority to police the shipping routes in the Bay and ensure safe navigation?
- Why did it take the Coast Guard over eight hours to realize the magnitude of the spill and initiate intensive containment and cleanup efforts?
- What is the chain of authority in responding to a spill and why did the Coast Guard fail to alert local authorities in a timely matter?
- What improvements in interagency communication can be made to ensure a better-coordinated response?
- Are admiralty and maritime laws sufficient to ensure that the parties responsible for the spill can be held liable for the cost of the spill?

Although there has clearly been much human and organizational failure that has exacerbated the damage of the spill, I would like to thank the many dedicated members of the Coast Guard, state and local employees, and countless volunteers that have worked to contain and cleanup the spill. All of us who love the Bay owe all of these individuals a tremendous debt of gratitude. Congress is working hard to make sure you have the resources you need.

The San Francisco Bay is a national and international treasure that is at the center of life in the Bay Area. I thank the committee for holding this hearing. Again, I look forward to working with all of you to ensure that future tragedies are prepared for, avoided, and mitigated.